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AUTHOR Trier, James D.
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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the use of school films (popular movies that are in some way about an educator or student) to engage student teachers in critically reflective practice. The paper begins by describing the main goals of the effort, examining the basic structure of the practicum that involves these films, and explaining the various constraints that must be overcome in the practicum. The paper then explains why school movies are used in the practicum, reviews how other teacher educators have drawn on school films in their work with student teachers, and provides detailed examples of some of the activities and projects that have been designed around the use of school movies. The paper finishes with conclusions drawn about using school films as pedagogical devices that invite student teachers to think in critically reflective ways about a range of important issues related to education. Appendices include a working list of school films. (Contains 36 references.) (SM)

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"Using Popular 'School Films' to Engage Student Teachers in Critical Reflection"

James D. Trier

Department of Curriculum & Instruction
University of Wisconsin-Madison

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Using Popular "School Films" to Engage Student Teachers[1] in Critical Reflection

For the reader to get a sense of what "school films" means in the title of this paper, I need to offer a simple working definition and some examples of school films. Generally, I conceptualize a "school film" as being a popular movie[2] that is in some way (even incidentally) about an educator or a student. Some examples of very well-known "school movies" are Dead Poet's Society, Lean on Me, Stand and Deliver, Dangerous Minds, Blackboard Jungle, To Sir With Love, *and* Mr. Holland's Opus. *Some examples of lesser-known school movies are* Waterland, Foxfire, Welcome to the Doll House, The 400 Blows, *and* Small Change.[3] *What I will do in the introductory section of this paper is discuss my main goal as a supervisor at UW-Madison, describe the basic structure of the practicum that I supervise, and explain the constraints that I work against in the practicum. Then I will be in a position to explain why I began drawing on school movies in the practicum, to review how other teacher educators have drawn on school films in their work with student teachers, and to provide detailed examples of some of the activities and projects that I have designed around the school movies. Near the end, I will discuss some conclusions I have drawn about using school films as pedagogical devices that invite students to think in critically reflective ways about a range of important issues.*

My main goal as a supervisor at UW-Madison is to engage student teachers in a critically reflective practice, which I will define here by drawing on Zeichner (1990), who contrasts critical reflection with "benign" or "generic" conceptions of reflection. Critical reflection involves not only focusing one's attention inwardly, on the more "technical" aspects of teaching, but also focusing one's attention "outwardly at the social conditions in which [individual and collective teaching] practices are situated." A critically reflective practice explicitly challenges the notion that teachers can "remain neutral about pedagogy, curriculum, and classroom organization and management," and it foregrounds the expectation that teachers will continually critique the institutional contexts in which they work "in order to see relationships between daily practices in the classroom and issues of schooling and society." Zeichner argues that teacher

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[1] I am using "student teachers" here in the way others use "pre-service teachers"; the two terms should be considered interchangeable in this paper.

[2] I am using "popular" here not to mean a well-known box-office hit, but to mean a product of the pop culture industry—so, an unpopular Hollywood movie would still be a "popular movie."

[3] See the Appendix for a list of school films and the years of their release.

educators should attempt to develop this "relational thinking" in their work with student teachers "by deliberately focusing students' attentions on particular kinds of issues connected to their everyday teaching activities that raise questions of equity and social justice."

The main problem with expecting student teachers to "raise questions of equity and social justice" about issues that connect to their "everyday teaching activities" is that the student teachers have done very little "everyday teaching," so they have very few actual teaching experiences to raise questions about.[4] This is especially the case for student teachers during their practicums. In the UW-Madison program, most student teachers have two practicums before they move into the more "classroom intensive" student teaching semester.[5] I am the supervisor of the second practicum.[6] Because a practicum is quite different in basic structural ways from the student teaching semester—and because these differences lead to certain inevitable constraints—I will first describe the practicum that I supervise, which will set up a discussion of the constraints inherent in the practicum. My reason for doing this is that the constraints that I work around ultimately led me to begin using "school films" in various ways for various reasons, which I explain below.

As I mentioned, I supervise student teachers during their second practicum, which precedes the much more "teaching" intensive student teaching experience. There are typically twenty student teachers in the practicum, and we meet once a week for a one-hour seminar. The

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[4] Granted, student teachers have had many years of exposure to teaching through their experiences as students, so they typically enter a pre-service teacher preparation program with certain assumptions, beliefs, and knowledge about what makes a good teacher, what good teaching is, and so on. That said, I would argue that until a person actually teaches, she or he cannot be said to have had "the experience of teaching." To have been a spectator of teaching (i.e., as students) is like being a spectator of, say, a sport: you might have ideas about what qualities go into making a good player, and what the best game-plan strategies are, but until you're actually "in the game," you can not really know how it feels or what is at stake in the actual practice.

[5] The 1-6 and 1-9 certification students have two practicums, whereas the Pre K-3 students have at least one more.

[6] The first is the Literacy practicum, and the second is the Math, Science, & Social Studies practicum.

student teachers are placed in classrooms for only a nine-week period during a fifteen-week semester, for just three mornings a week.[7] During this time, student teachers are typically observing and doing some one-on-one and small group work for the first couple of weeks. Gradually, though, they begin teaching some whole-class lessons here and there, only assuming full responsibility for teaching all the morning classes during a two-week block near the end of their placement (which means just six mornings). In this nine-week period, I do two observations of lessons for each student teacher.

In one sense, this practicum can be viewed as a transitional one: the student teachers enter it having done some observing and teaching in their first practicum, they acquire a bit more teaching experience during this second practicum, but they are not yet in the more intense phase of the pre-service sequence when they will assume the far greater responsibility of teaching a full-load of courses day in and out over a semester. What this means for the student teachers is that they come to the practicum with relatively few teaching experiences to draw on in their reflective writings and in the discussions during the weekly seminars. What this means for me as the supervisor is that I have much less contact and time with the student teachers (essentially an hour each week) than the supervisors of the student teaching semester will have with them the next semester. This is all to say that in my efforts to engage student teachers in a critically reflective practice during the practicum, I contend with two main constraints: (1) I have relatively little time and substantive contact with the student teachers; and (2) the student teachers have not yet acquired very many teaching experiences to reflect on.

One major effect of these constraints is that the course "readings" and the weekly seminars take on a special importance. What I assign students to read outside of class, the

[7]Along with being placed in classrooms, the student teachers are taking three methods courses the rest of the time.

activities and projects that they do as part of the practicum, and the discussions we have in the seminar must carry most of the burden of creating opportunities for student teachers to think critically. What I found myself doing during my first semesters during seminar was drawing on a few school films now and then to supplement certain parts of the assigned readings. For just one example, when we were discussing an article titled "Preparing Monocultural Teachers for a Multicultural World: Attitudes Toward Inner-City Schools" (Aaronsohn, Carter, and Howell, 1995), I focused on how nearly all of the students who Aaronsohn, et. al. studied had negative images about inner city schools.[8] Then I suggested that perhaps these images were in part the result of how popular films have depicted the inner city school. To make this point, I showed selected scenes from the movies *The Principal*, *187*, and *The Substitute*, which are set in inner-city schools. Each of the scenes depicted violence involving male students of color. One scene showed a white principal being badly beaten by a gang of black students; another showed a black teacher being repeatedly stabbed in the back by a black student; and another scene showed a white teacher using martial arts moves to subdue and disarm two Hispanic male students in a classroom. After viewing these scenes, the student teachers engaged in a rich discussion about the negative depictions of inner city schools and students in films and various news media. For example, some admitted that their own images of inner city schools were probably derived from having watched such films as these. And others shared their own experiences of having attended an inner city public school, observing how Hollywood films seem to spectacularize the violence that did, at times, indeed take place in the schools that the student teachers had attended.

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[8]Most of the 80 student teachers in the study were young, white females "from homogeneous suburban communities" who had little, if any, experience in being involved with people of color, and no experience teaching "inner city" children.

After a few more fairly casual supplemental uses of scenes from some other school movies during other seminars, I ultimately decided to incorporate these rich popular culture texts into the practicum in a variety of ways.

Part of the process of conceptualizing how I might take up school films in the practicum involved reading what film critics and historians had been written about school films, as well as reading about how other teacher educators had drawn on school films in their work with student teachers. I found a number of worthwhile articles and book chapters with analyses (some quite serious, others very playful) about one or several films (Ayers, 1994; Bauer, 1998; Edelman, 1983; Giroux, 1994, 1997; Hill, 1995; Long, 1996). I also found a few valuable book chapters that served as introductions to what might provisionally be called the "school film genre" (Considine, 1983; Farber & Holm, 1994; and Reed, 1989), as well as two dissertations on school films (Schwartz, 1963; Crume, 1988). Especially valuable for me were the handful of accounts by other teacher educators (Brunner, 1991, 1994; Giroux, 1993; Joyrich, 1995; Robertson, 1995; and Weber & Mitchell, 1995) who described using school films with student teachers. It is beyond the scope of this paper for me to go into detail about most of these works, so I will limit myself to brief discussions of those that were especially useful.

The most valuable introduction to school films was a section from David Considine's book *The Cinema of Adolescence* (1985) titled "School on the Screen." Considine offers an enjoyable, readable history and analysis of the genre. At one point, he sums up one of his views about the "school" movie by comparing it to the "family" movie (which he had discussed earlier in the book):

> The depiction of school on screen, like the depiction of the family, serves as an image of society as a whole. Both the family and the school are microcosms of society. What goes on in one is intimately related to what occurs in the other. In

> depicting school life Hollywood, consciously or unconsciously, touch[es] upon concerns, fears, attitudes, and preoccupations that [go] well beyond the boundaries of the schoolyard and [spill] out into the wider society beyond. The changing image of the school, and particularly of the school teacher, can therefore be read as a reflection, albeit a distorted reflection, of changes not only within the American school system but within the nation itself.

Considine's method of showing the relationship between the content of "screen schools" and a wide range of issues and concerns within society is to work back and forth between the films and various print and television sources that focus on a wide range of issues. In putting the films into their social and political contexts, Considine draws on newspaper and magazine articles, journal articles from educators, reports put out by committees on education, books written about school experience, and so on. For example, Considine explains that the "screen school" of the mid-to-late 1950s followed a formula that showed schools "failing to responsibly deal with the young," as in *Blackboard Jungle* or *High School Confidential*. In contextualizing these films, in trying to show how "they must be considered at least in part to be an accurate reflection of conditions within American education," Considine draws on a variety of compelling sources. It is worth quoting one example at length to make this point:

> When the Russians successfully put Sputnik into space in 1957, they issued a serious challenge to Americans' belief in their own superiority. Rear Admiral Rickover jarred Americans from complacency by a scathing attack on the education system. In the past, school had placed emphasis on socialization in order to meet the task of Americanizing the large number of migrants who filled the classrooms. Such a task had resulted in a softening of the curriculum, with the result that the nation was now paying the price and falling behind the Soviets in technological advances. [Progressive] education, said *Cosmopolitan* [1958], produced "shallow citizens with flabby minds, tragically ill-fitted to meet new stern challenges of leadership in the struggle for tomorrow." The spectre of violence and delinquency had also served to erode confidence in the schools. "Hoodlums in the High Schools" appeared in *Catholic World* in April, 1959. "It is no exaggeration," the author asserted, "to say that practically no learning takes place in 50 percent of our classrooms from ninth through twelfth grade. . . . The sincere, capable and hardworking pupil is penalized by a school system and a

> philosophy of education which cannot be productive of other than *blackboard jungles*. [emphasis added][9]

Situating the films within their social context in this way is, I think, a very productive approach to "reading" these films, and later in my paper I describe one project that is an emblematic example of the way that I have contextualized one particular school film (a project involving the film *To Sir, With Love*—see ***"Collage Tapes Based on School Films"***).

It is important to note here, though, that Considine does not suggest how these films might be taken up by educators in, say, the context of a teacher education program. In fact, I found that only a few teacher educators have published accounts of how they have drawn on school films in their work with student teachers. These accounts were valuable for me when I was conceptualizing some of my own projects, so I will briefly discuss them in order to suggest connections between them and my own projects later on.

"Teacher Educators Who Have Drawn on School Films"

In "Pedagogy, Resistance, and Celluloid Culture" (1993), Henry Giroux explains how he once used school films in a graduate course comprised of student teachers. He says that while he was teaching a group of "mostly white, middle- and upper-class" prospective teachers, he wanted to introduce students "to films and other texts in which both teachers and students exhibited forms of resistance in the classroom." His intent was to have students "analyze the relationship between their own experiences in schools and those portrayed in popular cultural forms." Giroux left the decision of what films to collectively analyze up to the students, and they chose *Dead Poets Society* and *Stand and Deliver*.[10]

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[9] This phrase is, of course, a reference to the film *Blackboard Jungle* (1955).

[10] Except for one paragraph, Giroux mainly discusses *Dead Poets Society*, so that is what I'll focus on here.

In Giroux's opinion, the students had chosen this film because they thought it was "a text which embodied much of what was perceived as the political and pedagogical principles [that he had thus far] encouraged in the course." He says his students comprehended the film "as 'living out' the perceived requirements and practices of critical teaching" that he had been foregrounding in the course. Based on what some of his students said, Giroux concluded that they had chosen the film not as the result of "an analytical reading of the text" but largely because "it made them feel good." In his words, he believed that the students saw the film as

> an exemplary model of critical pedagogy because it staked out a terrain of hope, and offered subject positions within which they could project an image of themselves as future teachers; an image that encouraged *them* to identify themselves as agents rather than as mere technicians. As some students pointed out, the film made them feel good about themselves as teachers-in-the-making.

For Giroux, however, "the film presented a model of liberal pedagogy," and it did not at all embody the critical pedagogy that he was advocating in his course. Giroux's implication is that his students mis-read the film, and he attributed their misreading to the film's "structure," which "undermined a critical reading of its own codes by establishing a strong emotional affinity between the viewers [his students] and the progressive teacher portrayed in the film." He adds that the film is very successful at "mobilizing popular sentiment through . . . an 'affective epidemic.'" In other words, the film played on his students' emotions and caused them to mis-read it.[11]

Giroux explains that his challenge with the students was "to address the power of hope and agency provided by the [film's] discourse of liberal humanism without destroying a sense of pedagogical possibility." His felt he could do this by "giving students the opportunity to analyze

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[11] For an explanation of the use of the term "read" (and its variations) here and afterward, see the section in this paper titled "Viewing *To Sir, With Love* as a Whole-Group Acitivity."

the plurality of meanings that informed the film," which he did by

> having students view the film from the perspective of their own experiences and histories by writing short, critical papers, which they then duplicated and shared with the rest of the class for dialogue and comment. It was at this point that the students' initial affective investments in the film were mediated critically by other texts, presented to the class [by Giroux], and dialogically voiced and challenged. As well, [Giroux] introduced magazine and newspaper reviews along with [his] own written commentary on the film. The pedagogical issue here centered on both having [his (Giroux's) own] voice heard, but at the same time providing the conditions for such a voice to be engaged and challenged.

Giroux says that through this process, most of his students came around to seeing how their original view of the film as being an exemplar of critical pedagogy was false. He adds, "Of course, there were students whose positions did not change, and who actively argued from a liberal humanist discourse," and though he was not able to persuade them out of this (in his opinion) misguided view, he felt good that he had provided them with a space where they "were able to affirm and defend their positions, without being subjected to a form of pedagogical terrorism which would put their identities on trial."

I found Giroux's effort to foreground the conservative ideological elements in *Dead Poets Society* in order to challenge his students' initial readings of the film very worthwhile, and I see myself as having done something quite similar with the film *To Sir, With Love*, which I discuss below (see ***"Collage Tapes Based on School Films"***).

Along with the work of Giroux, I found Diane Brunner's way of drawing on what she calls "stories of schooling" useful. In *Inquiry and Reflection: Framing Narrative Practice in Education* (1994), Brunner explains how she has drawn on a variety of "stories of schooling" (in novels, plays, short stories, television shows, movies, and so on) to engage student teachers in the process of examining their assumptions about a range of issues. The kinds of "unexamined

assumptions" that become the focus of analysis for the student teachers include: "how students make sense of curriculum," "how school as a social institution tends to structure inequality," and how "the complex ways in which inequitable situations tend to mediate against students' learning.'"

Brunner gives a general outline of this project by saying, "Through inquiry and reflection in an extensive study of stories of schooling read in parity with professional texts, teachers may be helped to question, if not dismantle, many preconceived assumptions about teaching as they develop a greater capacity for understanding the meanings students make about schooling." Brunner also gives specific reasons for having student teachers read a variety of "stories of schooling" (mainly novels and films) "in parity" with "professional texts" in this way:

> First, students often have difficulty reading critically some literature and viewing popular movies . . . and television programs . . . , but critical readings can provide a lens for such a reading. And second, critical readings . . . may be difficult to unpack without situating them in some greater approximation to reality. In other words, making the leap from abstraction to situation can be difficult without a bridge. But stories or narrative can provide such a link and may be the key to making meaning.

She also says that whereas "professional texts" (academic journal articles, books and book chapters written by academics) serve well to name a particular educational problem (such as "the culture of silence" or "tracking as a device for reproducing class, gender, and racial inequality"), "stories of schooling" in the form of films, novels, etc., "illumine" these problems in ways the professional texts cannot, mainly by inviting us to experience situations vicariously through dramatic forms.

Throughout her book, Brunner gives many examples of the dozens of "stories of schooling" that she and her students read. Among the school films that she assigned her students to view, along with reading "professional texts," were *Stand and Deliver*, with Mike Rose's

Lives on the Boundary; *Dead Poet's Society*, with Aronowitz and Giroux's "Schooling, Culture, and Literacy in the Age of Broken Dreams"; *Lean on Me*, with the book *The Blackboard Jungle*; and *Educating Rita*, with passages from *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Students responded to the films and readings by writing in their journals and discussing them in class. Brunner explains that student teachers made connections not only between the films and the readings, but also between the assigned film/reading texts and their own experiences, both recent and very distant ones, from their own experiences in schools. Overall, Brunner believes her pairing of "professional" with pop cultural texts brings about understandings in students that they otherwise would not reach. As I show later, in my own projects I also have asked students to read "professional" texts side by side with school films, and like Brunner, I have found that the critical readings provided a valuable lens through which student teachers read the films, and the films served to make concrete the abstractions in the readings. (For example, see "**The 'Discourses/Observing Reel Life' Project"** and ***"The 'Resentment' School Film and the 'Lullaby' School Film"*** projects below.)

A much different project from Giroux's and Brunner's that involved a teacher educator drawing on school films in her work with student teachers is that of Judith Robertson. In "Screenplay Pedagogy and the Interpretation of Unexamined Knowledge in Pre-Service Primary Teaching" (1995), Robertson describes a study she conducted with student teachers that involved school movies. Robertson's subjects were "twelve white female pre-service teachers, aged 20-40," who, over the course of one semester "collectively watched, discussed, wrote about and were interviewed about five different movies about teaching": *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, *Stand and Deliver*, *Sylvia*, *The Second Awakening of Christa Klages*, and *Au revoir les enfants*. Robertson sought to understand the meaning of the student teachers' "experience of screen

images and stories of teaching at an early stage of formation in teaching." More specifically, she was interested in the women's "emotional investment in certain scenes, characterizations, and investments of teaching." To discover their "emotional investment," Robertson focused their movie viewing by asking them "to note strong personal impulses [that] they felt during viewing – (for example, tears, laughter, agitation, strong memories)." Students wrote in their journals, and Robertson interviewed the students and then transcribed the interviews. The journal and interview transcripts together formed the "text" (data) that Robertson coded, analyzed, and interpreted. In coding the data, Robertson focused on "lexical frequencies," which included "repetitions of words, tonal patterns and ideas."

Robertson states that her "hypothesis in screenplay pedagogy is that images of teaching are used as screens" for student teachers, "who, through reading and writing play out unexamined desires concerning knowledge in teaching." Drawing heavily on Freud, Robertson argues that student teachers project their unconscious desires, fears, frustrations, longings, etc., onto the "screens" of "images of teaching." Put another way, when student teachers write and talk about their intense emotional reactions to specific movie scenes, they are projecting material from "the unconscious" onto the images, through their language. And it is in the printed text (the student teachers' journals and the transcripts of the interviews) that Robertson sees the traces of their repressed desires, longings, etc. through the "repetitions" of words, phrases, etc. For example, Robertson explains how concept of composure—constructed through the repetition of the word "composure" in student responses to the film *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*—"may be seen to function as a screen through which the women play out hidden desire concerning feminine authority in teaching." She offers many other such interpretations about hidden

desires, longings, fears, and so on. (For an example of a project of mine that resonates somewhat with Robertson's, ***see "One Hundred School Films"*** below.)

Perhaps the richest account of how teacher educators have drawn on school films in their work with student teachers comes from co-authors Claudia Mitchell and Sandra Weber in their book *Reinventing Ourselves as Teachers: Beyond Nostalgia* (1999). They focus on a number school films in two ways: one is to engage student teachers in processes associated with self-study, and the other is to encourage student teachers to critique school movies for the ways the movies attempt to position viewers ideologically. Central to how Mitchell and Weber take up these movies is their notion of the "cumulative cultural text." In the chapter titled "Reel to Real: Popular Culture and Teacher Identity," Mitchell and Weber describe their notion of a "cumulative cultural text" as follows:

> A multitude of teacher images feeds into the popular culture into which we are born. These images overlap, contrast, amplify, address, or confirm each other as they compete for our attention. The cumulative cultural text of 'teacher' is a massive work-in-progress that embraces the sub-texts and counter-texts of generations of paintings, memoirs, novels, songs, toys, movies, software, stories, photos, and television.

At one point, they pose this question to themselves: "What do popular teacher images have to do with teacher education or professional development?" One answer they give is that studying these popular texts (movies about teachers, in this case) can be useful for student teachers, practicing teachers, and academics to "clarify [their] professional identities." Student teachers can "unmask and use the collage of contradictory images, cliches, and stereotypes" found in school films "to advance professional development." And the main way they can engage these films is to do "close readings" of them (which Mitchell and Weber do with *Kindergarten Cop* and *Dangerous Minds*). They also suggest reading the films against the "codes and conventions"

common to movies about teachers (such as the conventions of "the teacher as hero," "the teacher as 'outsider,'" and so on). And they call for reading the texts "for Self-Study" reasons, giving some very good suggestions for mini-projects that student teachers and teachers might undertake. For example, they suggest that student teachers view school films either alone or as a group. They suggest watching each film at least twice: once for a "global impression," and the second time to make "note of things that stand out, puzzle, shock, please, trouble, enthrall or amuse." In other words, student teachers should "keep tabs on what triggers [their] own emotional reactions." Mitchell and Weber also suggest a series of prompts and questions that might be asked about the films, a few of which are:

> Describe the scene or event that gripped or affected you the most. What is it about that particular scene that 'gets to you'? How does it connect to you or to your social or political contexts?
>
> Describe the scenes or elements . . . that ring true to you, and explain why they seem realistic and plausible. Do they remind you of any real life experiences?
>
> What images or stereotypes of teachers, students, or schooling are introduced or perpetuated?
>
> Why do you think this [film] has become popular? Whose point of view or gaze is presented or dominates?
>
> How are power or cultural issues related to class, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, or age played out?
>
> What messages or images do you take away from this [film] and how might they relate to your professional life?

Mitchell and Weber also recommend having student teachers write response papers to the films—or writing a comparison paper of one film with another—and sharing these response papers in seminar discussions. In my view, these are all very good lines of inquiry to follow (see the ***"One Hundred School Films"*** activity below).

Now that I have contextualized my work as a supervisor and given a brief overview of what other teacher educators have written about how they have used school films, I am in a position to give examples of how I have taken school films up in a formal way. I will do this by describing some of the activities and projects that I have designed around certain school films.

Activities and Projects Using School Films

"Simple Compilation Tapes of School Film Scenes to Introduce Issues"

During the first seminar of the semester, I ask the student teachers to make a list of the main issues they want to discuss during the semester. A great variety of issues emerge. Many of the issues concern the (seemingly) more "technical" aspects of teaching, such as: classroom management, resolving conflict in the classroom, how to integrate school subjects, how to teach "controversial" material, and how to establish a positive sense of classroom community.[12] There are also "bigger picture" issues, such as: gender equality in the classroom, the unequal funding of education between inner-city and suburban schools, the relation between theory and practice in teaching, and the escalation of violence that has taken place in schools in recent years.

Within the context of how the media have spectacularized each of the recent school shootings that have taken place (Columbine, Jonesboro, and Oklahoma), it is not surprising that the issue of school violence always makes the lists of many students. To introduce this issue during the seminar, I have shown a tape of violent scenes that I have compiled from school movies dating from the mid-1950s to the present.

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[12] Of course, these are not actually "technical" issues, but they can become "technical" (or only "instrumental") if they are not situated within a larger context that connects these issues with those of race, class, gender, etc.

The compilation tape begins with scenes from *Blackboard Jungle* (1955), a film about "vicious young hoodlums well on their ways to careers of crime and violence."[13] The violent scenes depict a male student attempting to rape a female teacher in the library, a group of male students badly beating up two teachers in an alleyway, and a teacher being knifed as he attempts to disarm a "hoodlum" during a classroom confrontation. The next scene is from *I Was a Teenage Werewolf* (1957), a film about "a likeable high-schooler prone to outbursts of violence." The scene is the opening one of the film and presents two males punching and brawling with one another within a circle of screaming teenaged onlookers; at one point, one of the boys ends up throwing dirt in the other's eyes and then swinging at him with a spade shovel. This scene is followed by the final part of the film *if*. . . . (1969), a British movie about "three unruly seniors who fail to conform." In the "surreal and violent ending" to the movie, the student who has suffered most from the "repressive conditions" of the boarding school leads a group of students in a machine-gun, grenade-exploding ambush where the students kill a number of school officials who are fleeing the school chapel, which the rebel students had tear-gassed. The next scenes of violence are taken from *The Class of 1984* (1982), a "visionary film" depicting "a frightening clash that pits the humanity of our present with a darkly violent future." The scenes include a student being knifed in the cafeteria, two teachers being beaten and knifed in an alleyway, and a fight scene in which a teacher and a student fight on the school rooftop, with the student ending up falling through a skylight and being hung by the neck from a rope that dangles above an orchestra that is playing to a stunned audience of parents in the school auditorium. Next is a scene from *Teachers* (1983), a film that "blows the lid off America's

[13] All of the quoted passages in this section are taken from the printed text that appears on the video box covers of the films (see ***"Video Box Covers as Secondary Texts"*** below).

troubled public schools." In the scene, a policeman shoots an unarmed student to death in a crowded high school hallway. Next come scenes from *The Principal* (1987), a film about gang members who "fight to control the school using knives—even guns when they have to." Among the scenes is one that shows a student attempting to rape a teacher, and another that shows a gang of students who put a hood over the principal's head and then beat him into a bloody mess in his office. These are followed by scenes from *Zebrahead* (1992), a film that reveals how America's "public schools are a white-hot cauldron of conflict." In this movie about how one Detroit "school's long simmering racial tensions explode into violence," an African American student is fatally shot because he "dare[d] to cross the color line and form a friendship" with a white student. From *Higher Learning* (1994), there is the scene in which a student armed with a rifle shoots into a crowd of students on campus, killing a young African American female. This is followed by a scene from *Basketball Diaries* (1994) in which a boy fantasizes about entering a classroom while repeatedly firing a rifle at the tyrannical priest/teacher who uses corporal punishment on the boys. Next comes a series of scenes from *The Substitute* (1996), a film about "a ruthless band of teenagers" who are a "terrifying menace" in an inner-city school. In the scenes, the substitute teacher (who is an ex-C.I.A. mercenary) and his fellow out-of-work mercenaries engage in battle with the local drug ring, which is led by the African American principal. The battle takes place at night in the high school and is replete with automatic weapons, grenades, and flamethrowers. The final scene in the compilation of violent scenes is from *One Eight Seven* (1997), a film about a "dedicated science instructor" with a "passion for learning" who is repeatedly stabbed in a brutal assault by a black student who was failing his class.

Because this compilation of scenes are from school films reaching back to the mid-1950s, one line of inquiry that opens up during seminar discussions concerns the level of violence in schools that existed in the 1950s and 1960s, the form that the violence took (fistfights? verbal threats? shootings?), and the degree to which school violence has increased during the last four or five decades. Students have also asked what the statistics on school violence are today, such as how many assaults and murders take place, and who assaults whom: student-on-student violence, student-on-teacher violence, teacher-on-student violence, and so on. Another area of questioning concerns the details about what actually took place in such recent school shootings as Columbine, Jonesboro, and Oklahoma. Students have asked what reasons and motivations have been attributed to the killers by "experts" who the media have called upon to explain the shootings. And students have also questioned how the media might have characterized the shootings if, for example, Columbine had been in an inner city school with a predominantly African American or Hispanic population. Questions have also arisen about how the media spectacles surrounding these recent school shootings have resulted in more stringent policies governing student behavior in the local schools where the student teachers are placed. Related to this are questions that students have about how they themselves should handle classroom situations—now, as student teachers, and later on, when they teach full-time—in which a student is acting in a threatening way, either to himself or others. Can a teacher use physical force with a student? Do the laws protect teachers from lawsuits if teachers use force to subdue a "violent" student?

All of these areas of questioning have led to various seminar activities and discussions. For example, some student teachers have collected web sites that focus on the recent school shootings. Others have presented seminar reports on school violence, both from a historical and

contemporary perspective. There have also been written critiques of some of the school films from which the collage scenes were taken. The student teachers have also offered stories about experiences of school violence that they either witnessed or experienced personally while they were students. And throughout the semester, the seminar discussion occasionally returned to the issue of school violence when student teachers would tell of an experience involving some act of aggression that they witnessed while in a classroom during their practicum.

The scope of this paper does not allow me to give detailed examples of other similar (in form) compilation tapes that I have used to introduce certain subjects and issues. For a list of other such compilation tapes, see **Appendix B**.

"One Hundred School Films"

This activity involves having students select a film from the over-100 school films that I make available to them (most of the film titles are included in the previous section, and a full list is in **Appendix B**). I have color photocopies of the video box covers of school films, and these photocopies are in a binder on reserve at the library. Students look through these "secondary texts" (see ***"Video Box Covers as Secondary Texts"*** below) and select a movie that they wish to view. As part of the assignment, I ask students to read the pieces by Robertson (1995) and Mitchell and Weber (1999) and to follow one of the viewing guidelines they suggest. Student teachers then either write a paper or give a seminar presentation of their response to the film.

For example, one student viewed the school film *Children of a Lesser God* according to Robertson's focus prompt "to note strong personal impulses" that are "felt during viewing (for example, tears, laughter, agitation, strong memories)." In her written response to the film, the student teacher explained that her younger brother had been born deaf, and watching the film

had been a powerfully emotional experience for her. She also explained that her mother had become a sign language teacher when her brother was a child so that she could teach him. And the student teacher herself had become a teacher because of her mother's example. This powerful personal story is not the kind that typically emerges in a practicum, and my knowing this as a supervisor deepens my sense of who the student teacher is and gives me a glimpse into her commitment to teaching.

Students who followed the focus questions that Mitchell and Weber suggest produced equally valuable response papers. For example, one student viewed the movie *Teachers* with this question in mind: "What images or stereotypes of teachers, students, or schooling are introduced or perpetuated?" The student noted that all the teachers in the film are incompetent, that the administration is viewed as inept and cowardly (in the face of a lawsuit), and that this mid-1980s movie perhaps should have been titled *Bashing Teachers* for how it demeaned the profession. In her seminar presentation, the student teacher drew on some research she had done to situate the film in its historical context, noting that the film came out during the Reagan years, when teaching and teachers were routinely held responsible for the many problems facing public education then (much like today).

Another student viewed the film *Waterland* and responded to this question: "What messages or images do you take away from this [film] and how might they relate to your professional life?" The film is about a veteran high school history teacher who is suffering from a nervous breakdown because of certain profound problems involving his personal life, and his problems pervade his teaching, spilling over into it, all of which ultimately leads to his "retirement." The "message" that the student teacher took from the film was that there is no fine boundary between what goes on in one's personal life and what takes place in the classroom, and

sometimes one can cross over into the other, with quite negative effects. Another student watched the film *Dangerous Minds* through the lens of these questions: "Why do you think this [film] has become popular? Whose point of view or gaze is presented or dominates?" The student teacher speculated that the film owed its popularity to a few things. One was that it was yet another "teacher savior" film, and another was that the main character was a female teacher (unusual in school films).

A group of students presented a seminar discussion of these three school films set in Catholic schools: *The Basketball Diaries*, *The Devil's Playground*, and *The Chocolate War*. They responded to the "religion" part of this question: "How are power or cultural issues related to class, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, or age played out?" They focused on how each film presents a negative image of the experience of attending a Catholic school, and they then counteracted these images with personal anecdotes about their own *positive* experiences in such schools. Another group of students watched the handful of school movies that are set in an elementary school (very few are): *Billy Madison*, *Jack*, and *Kindergarten Cop*. They responded to this directive: "Describe the scenes or elements . . . that ring true to you, and explain why they seem realistic and plausible. Do they remind you of any real life experiences?" What they found was that almost nothing (in their view) in any of these "elementary" school films rang true or seemed realistic or plausible.[14]

These are only a few examples of the many films that student teachers have selected to

[14]*Billy Madison* is about the grown son of a millionaire who demands that Billy get a high school degree before he can inherit the family fortune, so Billy attends grades 1-12 in 24 weeks. It's all laughs and goofiness. *Jack* is a comedy about a ten year old boy with a genetic make-up that has aged him to look thirty-five. The film centers around the laughs and heartache of his going to school for the first time (fifth grade). And *Kindergarten Cop* stars action-film/body-builder star Arnold Schwarzenegger as an undercover cop who become a kindergarten teacher in order to catch a criminal. The film focuses on the laughs involved in his efforts to become a teacher.

view from those I have made available. What I have found (and I think the above examples suggest this) is that through this activity, student teachers articulate a range of assumptions, beliefs, and knowledge about many issues related to teaching. They also foreground certain biographical information that helps me to get to know them better, which is important for me as their supervisor.

Viewing To Sir, With Love as a Whole-Group Activity

Among first activities that I assign during the practicum that is related to school films is for students to view *To Sir, With Love* by a certain seminar date. Students turn in a written response to the film, and we then discuss the film after I have had time to read these responses. Inevitably, there is a wide-range of opinions and impressions. Some students love the film and "read" it in what Stuart Hall (1980) has called a "preferred" way. These are readings in which students uncritically accept the viewing positions that the film works to make most inviting; such readings are filled with praise for how Sir cares for his students, for his willingness to try new ways to reach the students, for how he makes the curriculum "relevant," and so on. Other students perform more "negotiated" readings in which they respond favorably to some parts but not to others, as when "Sir" berates the girls in one scene, calling them "sluts," or as how the film seems to be saying that a good teacher must be "an outsider" without any training who succeeds where other (trained) teachers have been failing. Occasionally, there are what Hall has called "oppositional" readings. These are readings that refuse any of the "preferred" viewing positions that the film offers, that do not engage in any negotiations, and that instead read the entire film in a "contrary" way, as when a student teacher views the film as "taming" the issue of race, as constructing gender in problematic ways, and as suggesting that a semester of good

teaching (like "Sir's") will have any dramatic effect on the post-graduation lives of the students in the film.

I assign *To Sir, With Love* early in the practicum for a few reasons: it is among the most well-known school films; it is from an earlier (and politically more radical) period, so it serves as a reference during our analyses of more recent school films; it is a multi-layered text that deals with issues of race, class, gender, power, culture, pedagogy, and more; it lends itself well to a number of subsequent "school film" activities and projects (see ***"Collage Tapes Based on School Films"*** below, for example); and its contradictory ideological elements inevitably lead to the above-mentioned "preferred," "negotiated," and "oppositional" readings of a text. Because one of my main research interests is to create situations that invite student teachers to articulate their assumptions, beliefs, and knowledge about a range of subjects, I emphasize during this first engagement with a school film Hall's theory of various ways of reading texts. My aim is to encourage students not only to critique a film (see above, Giroux, 1993), but also to take pleasure in the meanings they make (Barthe, 1975; Fiske, 1987), as well as to feel at ease in finding themselves "reading" the film in contradictory ways. One way that I attempt to convey this way of "reading" to students is through the seminar discussions of the film. Students discover that their own particular readings are not shared by everyone, and that there are a lot of contradictory readings. I typically take this opportunity to explain Hall's theory and to encourage students to continue to read in multiple ways in their future engagements with school films.

The "Discourses/Observing Reel Life" Project

The purpose of this project is to encourage student teachers to observe through the theoretical framework of Discourses what takes place in the classrooms that they will be

working in. Toward this end, I ask students to read what Brunner has called a "professional text" within the context of a "school film" project. Student teachers first read the chapter titled "Discourses and Literacies" from James Gee's *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourses* (1996). We discuss the reading in seminar, focusing our analysis on key passages such as these:

> Discourses are ways of being in the world, or forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities, as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes. A Discourse is a sort of identity kit which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular social role that others will recognize.
>
> Discourses are always embedded in a medley of social institutions, and often involve various 'props' like books or magazines of various sorts, laboratories, classrooms, buildings of various sorts, various technologies, and a myriad of other objects from sewing needles (for sewing circles) through birds (for bird watchers) to basketball courts and basketballs (for basketball players).

I then ask students to write a paper on the various Discourses that they are currently members of or have been members of. Because most of the students in the program are young, white females who come from middle-class backgrounds, they typically end up identifying themselves as being members of a "white, middle class Discourse." They have also identified themselves as being members of a "female Discourse," a "student Discourse," a "student teacher Discourse," and so on. Once the students have begun thinking in terms of Discourses—and once they have a clear sense of what Discourses they are members of—they can then view certain school films through this "Discourse" lens to analyze the different Discourses that the films construct. The purpose here is for them to observe and analyze Discourses (constructed in films) that differ from the ones they belong to, and then to make connections between these cinematic constructions and the "real" Discourses that they see at work and in contention in the schools and classrooms they are placed in.

I make many suggestions of films to watch and discourses to look for, and students choose a film to study either individually or as part of a small group. Examples of films that I have used (and the Discourses to focus on in them) are *Pump Up the Volume* and the construction of the "white teen angst and rebellion in suburbia" Discourse; *Higher Learning* and the Discourse of "being Black on a white campus"; *Welcome to the Dollhouse* and the "horrible middle school years" Discourse (especially good for student teachers placed in middle schools); and *Good Will Hunting* and the "working class" Discourse.

What I would like to do now is briefly describe one scene from *Good Will Hunting* and follow it with a discussion of what some student teachers wrote and said about it after studying the film from the perspective of the Discourse of social class.

Good Will Hunting is about a young man from Southy (Irish, very working-class part of Boston) who is a math genius, but he is messed up, having spent his life in foster homes where he was beaten, getting into trouble with the law, etc. But an M.I.T. professor discovers his genius and wants Will to develop his gift, but Will fights his efforts in great part because of his strong working-class identification, which he thinks he would be betraying if he "left" the neighborhood, his mates, etc. The scene that became the focus for the student teachers comes near the end, when Will and his friend are at a construction site. They're standing by their trucks, taking a lunch break, drinking a beer (cranes and rock in the background). Will is telling his friend how he envisions his future: "I'm going to fucking live here for the rest of my life. You know—be neighbors, have little kids, fucking take them to Little League together up Foley Field." Here's the rest of the dialogue (WCF= Working Class Friend):

> WCF: Look, you're my best friend, so don't take this the wrong way, but in 20 years, if you're still living here, coming over to my house to watch the Patriots games, still working construction, I'll fucking kill you.

Will: What the fuck you talking about?

WCF: Look, you've got something none of us got.

Will: Oh, come on. Why is it always this? I mean, I fucking "owe it to myself to do this or that"?

WCF: Fuck you. You don't owe it to yourself. You owe it to me. Cuz tomorrow, I'm going to wake up and I'll be 50. And I'll still be doing this shit. And that's all right, that's fine. But you're sitting on a winning lottery ticket. But you're too much of a pussy to cash it in. And that's bullshit. Cuz I'd do anything to have what you got. So would any of these fucking guys. It'd be an insult to watch if you're still here in 20 years. Hanging around here is a waste of your time.

One student teacher wrote of this scene that the Working Class Friend made a lot of sense, that Will "should have done all he could to escape the life of working construction and drinking and just hanging out with his friends who were never going to go anywhere." But another student found the dialogue's representation of "construction work and the working class" to be "an insult to the real [working class] people who work in construction and [who] take their kids to the park and [who] watch football games together." A third student focused on how the film seemed to be saying that "the only way a working class person could ever get into M.I.T. [Massachusetts Institute of Technology] is through being born with a gift [rather] than through hard [intellectual] work." Each of these responses reveals a different set of assumptions, beliefs, and knowledge, and the seminar discussions that ensued provided students with a range of issues to reflect on regarding social class and how the media reinforce dominant "class" Discourses. For example, some student teachers who engaged in the "preferred reading" of the film (i.e., that Will should escape the hell of a working class existence) admitted, through the give-and-take of a seminar discussion, that the scene did indeed seem to offend a large part of American society (which includes millions of working class people). But they noted that most

Americans strive to move from one class to another, mainly through trying to find a better-paying job, so the film seems to have a "message" that is part of "the American way." Other students who were offended by the scene revealed their own working class backgrounds, so a productive autobiographical element entered the seminar discussion.

"Video Box Covers as Secondary Texts"

Along with designing projects around school films, I also draw on certain "secondary texts," which John Fiske (1987) has described as including criticism and publicity that surround a "primary text," such as a film. In the case of school films, the video box covers found on the shelves of video rental stores are one form of "secondary text." I have made color photocopies of over 100 video box covers, and I have used these photocopies to design a number of activities that engage student teachers in a variety of critical "readings" of these rich, ideologically-laden, visual-print publicity texts.

One such activity is called "The 'Inner-City' v.s. The '(Inner) Suburbs.'" The idea for this activity emerged when I noticed that the representations on the "inner city" covers are fundamentally different from those of the "suburb" school films. A casual analysis of only the visual elements of the covers reveals that the inner-city box covers (for example, *Blackboard Jungle*, *Stand and Deliver*, *The Principal*, *Dangerous Minds*, *187*, *The Substitute*) are dominated by dark colors—mainly pitch-black and blood red—and feature male teachers or principals as the central figures, usually in aggressive poses (holding a baseball bat, standing behind a desk where an automatic weapon rests). In contrast, the "suburb" covers (for example, *The Breakfast Club*, *Welcome to the Dollhouse*, *Jawbreakers*, *Clueless*, *Can't Hardly Wait*, and so on) glow with bright reds, greens, purples, blues, and pinks, and the central figures are nearly always young, white teens smiling, holding one another, laughing, kissing, and so on.

For this activity, I ask students to work in groups to analyze the covers. I give only one prompt: that they should initially focus only on the visual elements of the covers, not the printed text, and they should group the covers according to their visual schemes. This prompt nearly always leads students to discover what I have already described here about the basic differences between the "inner city" and "suburb" covers. With the covers grouped into "inner city" and "suburb" categories, students then go on to produce a number of spontaneous insights. For example, they observe that the inner city films are typically serious dramas that often involve violence and death (*Zebrahead*, *The Class of 1984*), whereas the suburb films range from being light-hearted romances (*Pretty in Pink*), dark-humor comedies (*Heathers*), celebratory youth-rebellion movies (*Pump Up the Volume*), and supernatural thrillers (*The Craft*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Carrie*). These "genre" observations then lead to various other topics, such as: Why are the "inner city" films always about death and violence, but the "suburb" films are not? Why are "youthful rebellion," "romance," and "the wonder of being a teenager" celebrated in the "suburb" films but not in the "inner city" films? What is the relationship between the cinematic representation of the "inner city" school and student, on the one hand, and the "real" world of the inner city school and the students who attend them, on the other? Why are there so few female teachers represented on the box covers or in these school films? What different audiences do these box covers and films seem pitched at?

Because many of the student teachers have seen some of these school films, they are also able to analyze how the print text on the video box covers can be "read back" into the films themselves. They articulated how both the images and the print text of the video box covers seem to pre-orient viewers so that they will activate certain "preferred" readings. For example, student teachers observed how the inner city covers all have negative descriptions of the schools

and students. For example, from *The Principal* box cover, there is this passage: "The Principal: He's teaching the students at Brandel High two words . . . NO MORE" (a slogan that echoes the Reaganite "Just Say No" anti-drug slogan, which became popular when *The Principal* came out). In the film, a black drug dealer and his gang terrorize the school, so the content of both the video box cover/printed text and the film are interrelated. Another example is from *187*. The cover reads in part, "When schools become war zones and both sides start taking casualties, what then?" In the film, a teacher who has been brutally stabbed by a student recovers from the assault, only to go off the deep end by carrying out vigilante acts against Hispanic gangbanger students (he kills one and chops the finger off another). Part of the text from *The Substitute* reads: "The Most Dangerous Thing About School Used to Be The Students." In the film, the substitute teacher uses his mastery of martial arts to subdue and disarm some Hispanic students in the classroom. From *Zebrahead*: "If America is a melting pot, its public schools are a white-hot cauldron of conflict." In the film, an African American student is shot. And from *Teachers*: "A student bleeds from a stab wound. . . . A teacher reassuringly checks the snub-nosed .38 tucked into her briefcase." At one point in the film, an unarmed student is shot to death by a policeman in a crowded school hallway. So, student teachers have analyzed these video box covers to arrive at the tentative conclusion that the inner city school is cinematically represented as a dangerous place where the students are the violent enemy that must be subdued.

Student teachers also note that the printed element of the covers of a typical white-teen-suburban film, however, is quite different. Though there can be some killing, it is in the context of "dark humor" (*Heathers*, *Jawbreakers*) or the "otherworldly" (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*). But most of the covers "read" like what most white, middle class parents would probably hope might be the experience of their teenage sons and daughters as they pass though school and

adolescence—at the very worst, maybe a little naughtiness here and there, maybe some teen angst, or maybe the inevitable trials and tribulations of love break-ups and struggles for popularity. For example, *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* is about "a rather magical young man" who "gives into an overwhelming urge to cut school," which leads to a lullaby tale of how "life at 17 can be a joy!" *Sixteen Candles* is about "your average teen, enduring creepy freshmen, spoiled siblings, confused parents and the Big Blonde on Campus who stands between her and the boy of her dreams"; and *The Breakfast Club* is about "five teenage students with nothing in common, faced with spending a Saturday detention together in their high school library."

The initial analyses that student teachers engage in of the images and the print matter of these secondary texts have led to a variety of activities and projects. For example, student teachers have researched local and national newspapers to see patterns of coverage of inner city schools, discovering a similarity between "real" media coverage and the representations in school films. They have also written autobiographical sketches of their own "suburban" experiences as public school students, noting that the "suburb" films captured the same kind of celebratory, "upbeat" moods that they recall experiencing themselves as students. A few students did a project in which they analyzed the musical scores that accompanied the films; one example of what they found is that rap was typically the music of inner city school films from the 1990s, whereas "light" rock and roll was typical of the "suburb" films. The conclusion they made was that "rap" carries a similar negative connotation in our society (at least among older white Americans) as it does in the films, so the music reinforces the content of such films, and vice versa for the "suburb" films. These are just a few examples of the kinds of projects and activities that grew out of the video box cover project.

"The 'Resentment' School Film and the 'Lullaby' School Film"

For this project, student teachers first read Cameron McCarthy's essay "Educating the American Popular: Suburban Resentment and the Representation of the Inner City in Contemporary Film and Television" (1998). In this "professional text" (Brunner, 1994), McCarthy argues that television and popular film fulfill "a certain bardic function" in society, "singing back" to white America "lullabies" that maintain the suburban myth of security and economic plenitude, while simultaneously creating "the most poignantly sordid fantasies of inner-city degeneracy and moral decrepitude," as in a movie such as *Falling Down*. Student teachers read McCarthy's article as an introduction to what I call "resentment" and "lullaby" school films. The former are "inner city" school films (for example, *The Principal*, *Lean on Me*, *187*, *The Substitute*); the latter are "inner suburb" school films (for example, *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, *Sixteen Candles*, *Can't Hardly Wait*, *Ten Things I Hate About You*).

After reading the essay, students then did one of a few possible activities. One was to compare an inner city school film and an inner suburb school film, analyzing them for the "resentment" and "lullaby" elements at work in each. I made a number of suggestions, such as comparing the dystopian *187* (1997) with the "feel good" *Mr. Holland's Opus* (1995) because both films came out around the same time but they were radically different. Another activity was to compare two inner-city school films from different decades to analyze the differences in how they construct their "sordid fantasies." For example, whereas the recent film *The Substitute* (1996) presents a white male teacher who enters an inner-city school whose violent collective student body is mainly Hispanic and African American, the film *The Class of 1984* (1982) also features a white teacher entering an inner city school, but this school's student body is nearly all white, yet just as violent as that of *The Substitute*. One question that arose was: Is there some

explanation for why the student body in the film set in the early 1980s is nearly all white, whereas by the late 90s, it is mainly comprised of people of color? A third activity was for students to watch two or three "suburb" school films to discover if the "lullaby" being sung in each is the same, or if there are variations on the song. For example, student teachers observed how *Pretty in Pink* (1986) and *Ten Things I Hate About You* (1999) are "suburb" films, but they are different, mainly because of when they were made. For just one example, student teachers noted how the main character in *Pretty in Pink*—a high school girl—is from the working class, and she is in love with an upper class boy, whereas *Ten Things I Hate About You* reverses this dynamic, with a working class male student attempting to romance an upper class female student. Student teachers read this "reversal" as suggestive of how gender is constructed differently in popular culture in the 1990s, which is itself representative of the "reversal" in such societal environments as the workplace, the family, academia, and so on.

"Collage Tapes Based on School Films"

One more way that I have drawn on school films is to make what I call "collage tapes." These are tapes in which I splice together scenes from school movies with footage from various sources, such as material from documentaries or the evening news. I find these tapes effective in challenging "preferred readings" of films, as Giroux (1993) did with *Dead Poets Society*. One collage tape I have made is based on one short yet very important scene in the film *To Sir, With Love* (1967), which I call the "rebellion" scene. The scene takes place shortly after Sir has blown up at the students, has thrown the books out, and has instilled a "We will be polite and discuss any topic that you wish" policy in the classroom. The students get on board with it, asking various questions about many topics. At one point, Pamela Dare asks, "Do you think it's wrong to change, to be different, to rebel, Sir?" Sir responds by saying, "It is your *duty* to

change the world, *if* you can—*not* by violence. Peacefully. *Individually*. *Not* as a mob." Of course, the problematic element here is that Sir poses only two forms of possible action regarding social change: actions performed "individually" in contrast to those performed "as a mob." The negative term in this binary is "mob," which Sir has chosen instead of, say, "group action." He implies that any "group action" constitutes a "mob" action and is to be avoided.[15] Student teachers rarely focus on this brief, problematic exchange in their reaction papers, so I have taken it up as a focus by making a collage tape about it. What I will do now is go into some detail about the tape, attempting to render in print something whose impact can only be fullyexperienced visually. (That said, I think it is worthwhile here to try to convey the collage's contents because these collage tapes are, in my view, powerful pedagogical devices.)

The tape lasts about ten minutes, and throughout it the exchange between Sir and Pamela is repeated ("spliced-in") at least a dozen times intermittently, between other spliced-in clips. The clips that I have imported are from a video titled *Berkeley in the Sixties*, scenes of various events that took place in 1964 and 1965, so they are essentially contemporaneous with the "rebellion" scene in *To Sir, With Love*. The clips that I have imported include scenes in which Mario Savio (a student leader/activist) is speaking to a large student crowd on the grounds of Berkeley; a scene where Berkeley students are being carried off by police; a scene of Savio being assaulted by police as he approaches the microphone to address the large student gathering that a university administrator had just been talking to; scenes of Vietnam footage that had been edited into the *Berkeley* film—the scene begins with the president of the SDS speaking critically about Vietnam to a large student crowd (on Vietnam Day, 1965)—there is raw footage of villages

[15] This is like referring to a union-management disagreement by using the terms "management" and "strikers." "Strikers" is the negative for "union."

burning, refugees fleeing, planes bombing the Vietnam countryside, all accompanying the voice of the SDS president; scenes of a 1966 Republican Party rally for governor, one of which features Ronald Reagan addressing the crowd about "the mess at Berkeley" and how the "ringleaders" should've "been taken by the scruff of the neck and thrown out of the university once and for all"; and a scene of Allen Ginsberg singing at a peace rally. (As I said, in between these clips I have inserted the clips from Sir and Pamela's exchange about "rebellion.")

I have shown this collage tape to the whole group after they have viewed the film and written a response paper to it, and after we have discussed it in seminar. After they view the collage tape, they write a reaction to it. The fairly clear effect of juxtaposing scenes of quite meaningful, courageous acts of group action with Sir's admonition to act only individually and "not as a mob" has a noticeable effect on the students teachers. Many of the students explain that by viewing the collage, they now see that Sir has a very conservative opinion about social change, and they find that they have to revise their conception or image of him. For example, here is one student's response:

> I guess the thing that I thought about the most [while viewing the collage] was that Sir kept telling the students that it was their duty to change things yet the other clips showed how "authorities" react when people do try and change things. It seems that it is not easy to change things and although people may have nothing but peaceful intentions—the reaction they get from people in power can make things turn violent. It seems that the authorities are usually not peaceful either—dragging kids out, etc. Thus, while students can be told that it is their *duty* to rebel and change things peacefully, other people and the people that say those things are really not ready to accept those movements for change.

I won't go into a detailed analysis of my reading of this spontaneously produced reaction, but I will say a few things. One is how this student clearly sees how it is typically "authorities" who react to "the people" in situations where "the people" are attempting to change things. She also sees that Sir is among those who encourage students to help bring about change, but who "are

really not ready to accept those movements for change," despite what they say. Now, this is no small thing to see about "Sir," who for most student teachers represents a "progressive" figure, not only as a teacher but also in his non-teaching life (I'm basing this observation on what students usually write about the film in their 2-3 page reaction papers.)

Conclusion

In this paper, what I have mainly attempted to do is give an idea of the many ways that I have drawn on school films to engage students in reflecting critically on a range of issues. The paper's focus has been such that I have not been able to go into great detail about the data collection processes that were a key element of my use of school films, though I have suggested it. For example, some students wrote individual papers in response to the films; others wrote group papers; many students emailed comments about the films to me, and I in turn emailed them back, thereby establishing another form of communication; and they made presentations during the seminar, which I audio-taped and transcribed. I also interviewed a number of students about their "reading" of this or that film, and then transcribed the interviews. From this rich pool of data, I discovered that students not only focused their analyses on a wide-range of issues related to education, but they also revealed a great deal about the assumptions, beliefs, and knowledge that they hold at this stage in their development as teachers. I can see that in another paper, I will be able to draw on this data in an analysis of how the assumptions, beliefs, and knowledge of the student teachers that I have worked with resonates with what the "learning to teach" literature in teacher education says about student teachers (see Borko and Putnam, 1996; Wideen, et. al., 1998).

What I would also say here is that I am not making any claim that the projects and activities I have designed around these school films are the "best" way to engage student

teachers; they collectively constitute just one more way of going about it. That said, I will add that I think that these school films comprise a rich body of texts that has yet to be explored as fully as it can be, and I hope in future projects to continue to draw on these films in a variety of ways that I have not had the time to explain in this paper.

One thing I have not gone into in this paper as much as I wanted to are the various connections I see between my project and various theories that inform it. I've suggested a relationship to certain theories of spectatorship (or "reading practices") associated with cultural studies (Fiske, Hall). But there are other theoretical traditions that I also see myself making gestures toward or borrowing from or working "within." For just one example, I see my project as having affinities with the act of *detournement* that the Situationists coneptualized in their theory of the Spectacle (Debord, 1967/rep. 1983). I won't attempt to develop here the notion/practice of *detournement*, nor how it is an effect of a theory of alienation and a totalistic, "spectacular" vision of modern society (see Plant, 1992). Instead, I'll just say (very simplistically) that, according to Debord (see Knabb, 1989), *detournement* entailed "the reuse of preexisting artistic [or mass-produced] elements in a new ensemble":

> Any elements, no matter where they are taken from, can serve in making new combinations. . . . [W]hen two objects are brought together, no matter how far apart their original contexts may be, a relationship is always formed. . . . The mutual interference of two worlds of feeling, or the bringing together of two independent expressions, supersedes the original elements and produces a synthetic organization of greater efficacy. Anything can be used.

I see the collages I make, juxtaposing movie footage and "raw footage" from documentaries, as *detournements*. But an act of *detournement* inherently depends on the "situation" where the *detourned* object is put into circulation, such as my use of a collage in a

teacher education seminar. It is the combination of the artifact of *detournement* with the situation that produces certain effects.

Another thing I have not done in this paper is "define" too narrowly what I have been calling a "school film." It should be clear by now that it is a term that I define broadly. In fact, a "school film" is, for my purposes, any film that has a school, a teacher, a student (or a university, a professor, or an undergrad or grad student) in it. I can work with such a fluid, open definition because, to me, even individual scenes "about schools, teachers, teaching," and so on always have the potential to be drawn on in some way as an example of something that might be called "screen education," or the "screen" (movie, film) depiction, representation, distortion, whatever, of some aspect of "Education." I know this last sentence probably complicates more than clarifies, but I am trying to suggest that I do not conceive of the "school film" in a limited way as part of some genre that can be analyzed for recurrent patterns, figures, setting, plot scenarios, and so on (though I find such studies interesting). Let me come at it from another angle. My main interest in these films concerns how I can use them while working with student teachers to discover what they think, assume, believe, and so on, and to see if I can play some role in creating situations that would invite them to engage in the process of discovering these things. And so, at this time, these school films—or films that have something about "schools, students, teachers" "in" them—are the tool or technology I've found myself using in my efforts to create situations that invite student teachers to engage in critically reflective thinking about a range of important educational issues.

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Appendix A — Other Compilation Tapes I Have Made

Here is a list of other "issue-oriented" compilation tapes and the films that I selected scenes from:[16] ***Chestnuts of the Genre***: *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*; *Blackboard Jungle*; *To Sir, With Love*; *Up the Down Staircase*; *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*; ***Inner City Schools I: Mostly Black & Hispanic students:***: *Blackboard Jungle*, *Up the Down Staircase*, *Lean On Me*, *Stand and Deliver*, *The Principal*, *Zebrahead*, *Dangerous Minds*, 187, *The Substitute*, *The Substitute 2*; ***Inner City Schools II: Mostly White Students:*** *To Sir, With Love*; *The Class of 1984*; *Teachers*; *High School U.S.A.*; ***The Inner Suburbs I: The 80s:*** *Fast Times At Ridgemont High*, *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, *Three O'Clock High*, *Heathers*, *Sixteen Candles*, *Some Kind of Wonderful*, *Pretty in Pink*, *The Breakfast Club*, *Summer School*, *How I Got Into College*; ***The Inner Suburbs II: The 90s:*** *Foxfire*, *Clueless*, *Can't Hardly Wait*, *She's All That*, *Election*, *Ten Things I Hate About You*, *Never Been Kissed*; ***Elementary School***: *These Three*, *The Children's Hour*, *Kindergarten Cop*, *Matilda*, *Jack*, *Billy Madison*; ***Middle School***: *Welcome to the Dollhouse*, *Angus*, *Small Change*, *The 400 Blows*; ***Catholic School***: *The Devil's Playground*, *Basketball Diaries*, *The Chocolate War*; ***Looking Back (Nostalgia films)***: *American Graffiti*, *Porky's (and sequels*)*, *Peggy Sue Got Married*, *Hoosiers*, *Dead Poet's Society*, *School Ties*, *A Christmas Story*, *The Browning Version*, *Dazed and Confused*, *Basketball Diaries*, *Mr. Holland's Opus*, *Pleasantville*, *Whatever*; ***Looking Back: "Musicals/Rock":*** *Grease*, *Grease 2*, *Pink Floyd's The Wall*, *Crybaby*; ***Musicals/Rock:*** *Grease*, *Grease 2*,* *Rock-n-Roll High School*, *Fame*, *Pink Floyd's The Wall*, *Crybaby*; ***Foreign Films (includes British and Australian):*** *Zero for Conduct*, *if . . . .*, *The 400 Blows*, *Small Change*, *Taxi Zum Klo*, *Torment*, *Nighthawks*, *Au Revoir le Enfants*, *Flirting*, *The Class of Miss MacMichael*; ***Private School (Boarding Schools, Prep Schools, Catholic Schools, etc.):*** *Tom Brown's School Days*; *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*; *Zero For Conduct*; *if . . . .*, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, *A Separate Peace*, *Dead Poet's Society*, *Basketball Diaries*, *Taps*, *The Chocolate War*, *Au Revoir le Enfants*, *Scent of a Woman*, *School Ties*, *Flirting*, *Rushmore*; ***Revolution and Resistance***: *Zero for Conduct*, *if . . . .*, *Pump Up the Volume*; ***Dark Visions***: *if . . . .*, *Pink Floyd's The Wall*; ***Dark Humor***: *Heathers*, *Welcome to the Dollhouse*, *Jawbreakers*; ***Gay Teachers***: *The Children's Hour*, *Torment*, *Nighthawks*, *The Devil's Playground*, *In and Out*; ***Students and Teachers as Aliens, Mutants, Paranormal, Etc.:*** *I Was a Teenage Werewolf*, *Carrie*, *Carrie 2: The Rage*, *Zombie High*, *Class of Nuke 'Em High (and 2 sequels)*, *The Class of 1999*, *The Class of 1999 II: The Substitute*, *The Craft*, *Disturbing Behavior*, *The Faculty*; ***Teacher as Hero or Savior:*** *Blackboard Jungle*; *To Sir, With Love*; *Up the Down Staircase*; *Conrack*; *Lean On Me*, *Stand and Deliver*, *The Principal*, *Dangerous Minds*; ***Female Teachers as Main Characters***: *The Corn Is Green*; *The Miracle Worker*, *Our Miss Brooks*; *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*; *Rachel, Rachel*; *Dangerous Minds*; ***Teachers in Personal Crisis***: *Rachel, Rachel*; *Waterland*; ***Genius Students***: *Little Man Tate*, *Matilda*, *Good Will Hunting*; ***The "Exceptional" and "Disabled" Student***: *The Miracle Worker*, *Children of a Lesser God*, Mask, *Little Man Tate*, *David and Lisa*; ***The "Working Class":*** *Educating Rita*, *Pretty in Pink*, *Some Kind of Wonderful*, *Little Man Tate*, *Good Will Hunting*; ***Black Teachers, Principals, Professors, School Personnel in School Films***: Scenes from: *To Sir, With Love*; *Up*

[16]For the year that each film was released, see Appendix B.

the Down Staircase; Conrack, Stand and Deliver, The Principal, Higher Learning, Dangerous Minds, 187, The Substitute, Ten Things I Hate About You; ***Teacher As Martyr***: Scenes from *Mr. Holland's Opus, Lean On Me*; ***The Hollywood Curriculum***: *Up The Down Staircase, Dangerous Minds, The Substitute*; ***Literacy Constructed***: *Teachers, Educating Rita, Conrack*; ***Educators Being Assaulted by Students***: *187; The Substitute; The Principal; The Class of 198;, To Sir, With Love; Blackboard Jungle;* ***Exasperated Teachers Lose Their Cool***: *To Sir, With Love; Mr. Holland's Opus; Kindergarten Cop; River's Edge; Carrie.*

Appendix B

A Working List of School Films

(This is an admittedly incomplete list)

Angus (1995)
Art for Teachers of Children (1995)
Au Revoir Le Enfants (1987)
Basketball Diaries (1994)
Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure (1989)
Billy Madison (1994)
Blackboard Jungle (1955)
Breakfast Club (1985)
Browning Version, The (1994)
Buffy The Vampire Slayer (1992)
Can't Hardly Wait (1998)
Carrie (1976)
Children of a Lesser God 1986)
Children's Hour, The (1961)
Chocolate War (1989)
Class (1983)
Class of Miss MacMichael (1978)
Class of 1984 (1982)
Class of Nuke 'Em High (1986)
Clueless (1995)
Coolie High (1975)
Conrack (1974)
Corn Is Green, The (1945)
Craft, The (1996)
Cry-Baby (1990)
Cutting Class (1989)
Dangerous Minds (1995)
Dangerously Close (1986)
Dazed and Confused (1993)
Dead Poet's Society (1989)
Devil's Playground, The (1976)
Disturbing Behavior (1998)
Educating Rita (1983)
Election (1999)
Faculty, The (1999)
Fame (1980)
Fast Times at Ridgemont High (1982)
Ferris Bueller's Day Off (1986)
Flirting (1989)

Foreign Student (1994)
Four Blows, The (1958, Trauffault, French)
Foxfire (1996)
Girls Town (1995)
Good Will Hunting (1997)
Heathers (1991)
Hiding Out (1987)
High School Confidential (1958)
High School High (1996)
High School U.S.A.
Higher Learning (1994)
Hoosiers (1986)
How I Got Into College (1989)
I Was a Teenage Werewolf (1957)
if . . . (1969, British)
In and Out (1997)
It's Elementary (1996)
Jack (1996)
Jawbreaker (1999)
Just One of the Guys (1987)
Kids (1995)
Kindergarten Cop (1990)
Lean On Me (1989)
Little Man Tate (1991)
Looking For Mr. Goodbar (1977)
Lord Love a Duck (mid-1950s)
Matilda (1996)
Mirror Has Two Faces, The (1996)
Mr. Holland's Opus (1995)
Never Been Kissed (1999)
Nighthawks (German Mid-80s)
Oleanna (1995)
One Eight Seven [187] (1997)
Our Miss Brooks (1956)
Paper Chase, The (1973)
Peggy Sue Got Married (1986)
Permanent Record (1988)
Pink Floyd's The Wall (1983)
Pleasantville (1998)
Porky's (1982)
Pretty In Pink (1986)
Pretty Maids All in a Row (1971)
Principal, The (1987)
Prime of Miss Jean Brodie (1969)
Prom Night (1980)

Pump Up the Volume (1990)
Quarterback Princess (1985)
Rachel, rachel (1968)
Rage: Carrie 2, The (1999)
Rebel Without a Cause (1955)
Renaissance Man (1994)
River's Edge (1987)
Rock-n-Roll High School (1979)
Rushmore (1999)
Say Anything (1989)
School Ties (1992)
She's All That (1999)
Sixteen Candles (1984)
Slaughter High (1986)
Small Change (1976, French, Truffault)
Small Wonders (documentary, 1990s)
Some Kind of Wonderful (1987)
Splendor in the Grass (1961)
Stand and Deliver (1988)
Student Teachers (1973)
Substitute, The (1996)
Substitute 2: School's Out (1998)
Summer School (1988)
Taps (1981)
Taxi Zum Klo (1980, German)
Teachers (1983)
Teacher's Pet (1958)
Teaching Miss Tingle (1999)
Ten Things I Hate About You (1999)
This Is My Father (1999)
These Three (1936, see The Children's Hour remake)
Three O'Clock High (1987)
To Sir, With Love (1967)
Tom Brown's Schooldays (1951)
Torment (1944, Swedish)
Under Cover (1987)
Up the Down Staircase (1967)
Waterland (1992)
Welcome to the Dollhouse (1995)
Whatever (1998)
Zebrahead (1992)
Zero For Conduct (1933, French)